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AN ISRAELI EYEWITNESS STORY

The Attack on the USS Liberty

By MICHA LIMOR

Written for the Associated Press

TEL AVIV—The torpedoes were ready for firing when our three Israeli torpedo boats zeroed in on the gray ship moving slowly on a southeasterly course off El Arish.

Not one of us on those torpedo boats could have suspected that this was the beginning of an incident which was to cause a long drawn-out international wrangle.

The morning of June 8, the fourth day of the six-day war, the Israeli torpedo boats were at their base refueling and taking on provisions.

On the ground, the capture of Sinai and of the western bank of the River Jordan had already been completed. On the naval front, the torpedo boats had already seen action and had spent many hours patrolling Israel's western border.

The crews were mostly members of the regular navy and only a minority of them reservists like myself.

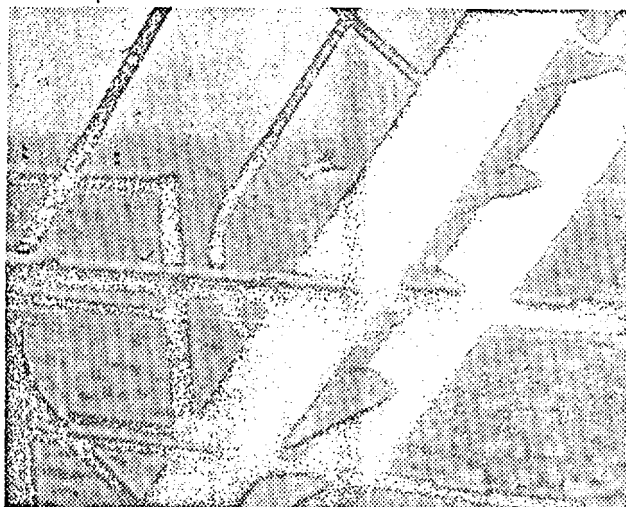
Equipment in Order

Over the years we had been trained to operate these torpedo boats—of French manufacture, some 10 years old—against the possibility that they would be put to the test.

Over the past days the gunners showed great accuracy. The instruments worked as they were supposed to, and the little vessel functioned with maximum efficiency.

On June 8, the sun was high in the sky when we received notification of an unidentified vessel some 12 miles off the El Arish coast, suspected of being an enemy craft.

In five minutes we were moving out in formation,



—United Press International

Torpedo boat sweeps by Liberty.

An Israeli naval reservist, Micha Limor, was aboard one of the torpedo boats that attacked the U. S. Navy communications ship Liberty. Here he tells the graphic details.

torpedo boat after torpedo boat, toward the deep sea.

We spotted the objective once on the radar screen. She was moving on a steady course, southeast at about 10 knots. We sailed toward her at an increased speed, looking at her through binoculars.

Planes Open Attack

Two of our planes flew over our heads a few minutes afterward. We saw them circle the ship several times, and then dive into the attack. They fired two rockets into the ship, and plumes of smoke rose. Then the two jets headed away toward the coast.

About 2,000 yards from the ship, the high masts, and the

many weird antenna showed that this was a warship. The side of the vessel was blotted out by smoke, and apart from three numbers along her side, we could not discern a thing.

We could see no flag on the mast, nor was anyone to be seen on the decks and bridge.

For seamen, this can mean only that this was the enemy.

We spent several minutes demanding identification by radio and by heliograph, she gave no answer. It also seemed that she had managed to control the fires and continued on a stable course.

It was decided to pass by her in battle formation and demand identification by firing across her bow. So we moved past at a tremendous speed, firing across the empty bridge and the bow. Suddenly, a sailor started firing at us with a heavy machine gun from the bridge. We directed cannon against him and a moment later he fell. Thus there was no doubt that we were faced by the enemy. The prolonged refusal to identify herself, the absence of any flag, the shooting at us, and above all the weird contraptions on the ship left us without doubt.

Torpedo Attack Made.

We wanted to make the ship surrender without sinking her. Once again we circled, firing across her bow. This time it had effect. No one appeared. No one reacted. The shells caused little damage to the

Nothing can annoy a torpedo boat crew more than being ignored. The order was given to prepare for a torpedo attack. We drew up along the left side of the boat at full battle speed. Just as in dozens of training exercises we reached the right angle and range and let go.

One of the torpedoes hit the boat amidships. There followed an enormous explosion and a huge water spout.

And then fires broke out and the boat leaned sideways. We waited for survivors as is customary for seamen—whether friend or enemy. But no one appeared on deck.

Suddenly, something fell into the sea. One of our formation approached and picking it up from the waters found it to be a rubber lifeboat with the lettering "U.S. Navy."

That was the very first sign of identification.

U.S. Flag Appears

A moment later there arrived on the scene the helicopter that was to have picked up prisoners. He hovered over the boat and then signaled us:

"They are raising the American flag."

It was crystal clear we had hit friends.

Dozens of shells, rockets and torpedoes were needed to drag a sign of identity from them. The showing of the Stars and Stripes at the very first stage would have prevented all that happened subsequently.

At the same time, it turned out later shore emplacements also learned that the attacked vessel was the American intelligence boat Liberty.

We received orders directly from the officer commanding the navy to give all necessary help. So we approached the Liberty and offered help, shouting through a loudspeaker.

Then an officer appeared for the first time on the bridge and screamed "Go to hell!"

Learning they did not need aid, we left. And the Liberty returned to its regular operation. It seemed any other ship would have sunk.

It was only later that we learned how many casualties were caused by our torpedoes.

"If this had been our boat," one of our officers said the following day, "we would have